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ABSTRACT

To gain a longitudinal look at the censorship problem facing schools and librarians, an analysis was made of the 110 requests for reconsideration of library or instructional materials that were processed by the reconsideration committee of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Community Schools from January 1971 through May 1981. The school district has had a written selection policy and an established procedure for handling challenged materials since January 1971. The analysis revealed the following: (1) most of the reconsideration requests dealt with materials in use at the elmentary school level; (2) the two formats most often challenged were picture books and fiction; (3) the literary genre most often challenged over the years was contemporary realistic fiction; (4) the number of reconsideration requests has risen significantly since 1973; (5) usually, the challenged material was retained, however, 60% of the complaints involving alternative lifestyles resulted in the material being withdrawn from the library; (6) the nature of the complaints has remained relatively consistent over the years; and (7) the five factors identified as most significant in determining whether the material would be withdrawn were the material's depiction of sex and sexual activity, the appearance of sexism in the work, its depiction of established family traditions or of alternative lifestyles, and the level of the library. (FL)

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The Iowa Plan Revisited: Ten Years Later

Agnes D. Stahlschmidt

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The Iowa Plan Revisited: Ten Years Later

Scattered reports from librarians, teachers, and the press indicate that attempts to challenge books and instructional materials in the public schools are on the rise. Judith F. Krug, the Director of the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom reported a significant increase in the number of bookbanning or censorship complaints that were received by her office since the November, 1980 presidential election. Most of those complaints, she claims, were associated with the Moral Majority or other equally conservative fundamentalist groups.[1] A similar increase in censorship complaints was noted in a report released July 31, 1981 by the Association of American Publishers, the American Library Association, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. The report, Limiting What Students Shall Read,[2] summarizes the findings of a nationwide survey that was conducted in the Spring and Summer of 1980 to investigate the relationship between censorship problems and book selection in the schools. Questionnaires were sent to a randomly selected stratified sample of 7500 public elementary and secondary school librarians, library supervisors, principals, and district superintendents in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. A total of 1891 of the sample responded. The findings of the study indicated that not only have the number of challenges increased in recent years, but more complaints are received from right-wing groups, whereas, in the early 1970's, more complaints were received from women and minority groups.

Are censorship complaints increasing, or are they just receiving more attention from the press? Are the types of complaints being [illegible] against books and instructional materials really different from those received 10 years ago? Most studies and reports about censorship issues are unable to address

questions such as these since censorship complaints tend to be sporatic and not well documented. One of the most significant findings of the AAP-ALA-ASCD survey was that many schools not only lack, or fail to follow, written policies and procedures for selecting materials, but also lack, or fail to follow, written procedures for reconsidering materials when challenges arise. Therefore, most studies and reports provide a description of the current status of censorship issues, when what is really needed is a longitudinal look at the censorship issue in order to determine if the problem is indeed becoming more critical.

In order to obtain a longitudinal look at the censorship problem an analysis was made of the requests for reconsideration of library or instructional materials that were processed by the Reconsideration Committee of the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Community Schools from January 1971 through May 1981. The school district has had a written selection policy and an established procedure for handling challenged materials since January of 1971. The Cedar Rapids procedure, known as the Iowa Plan, embodies a "due process" procedure for handling challenged materials. The "due process" procedure provides the residents and employees of the school district with the right to formally challenge instructional materials used in the district's educational program on the basis of appropriateness. A unique feature of the reconsideration procedure is that a majority of the Reconsideration Committee members are students and nonprofessional persons from the community. The feeling being that a committee that is chaired by a community member and that has a majority of lay members will have more credibility with the community and that the decisions of the committee will be viewed as being objective rather than being automatically supportive of prior professional decisions on selection.[3]

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to analyze the requests for reconsideration that had been formally submitted to the Reconsideration Committee of the Cedar Rapids (Iowa) Community Schools and to describe the reconsideration requests in terms of the format of material, literary genre of material, level of library where the request originated, date the request was processed, the action taken, and the nature of the complaint.

A total of 117 reconsideration requests were processed by the Reconsideration Committee from its inception in January 1971 through May 1981. Of those 117 requests, seven contained insufficient information for use in this study, leaving a total of 110 for analysis. The 110 reconsideration requests involved 81 different titles. An instrument was designed by the investigator for use in coding the data. A pilot test using 20 of the requests, was done in order to ensure that the categories in each area of the instrument were sufficient to cover all possibilities. Under the category "Nature of Complaint", up to three responses were recorded for each reconsideration request. No attempt was made to determine the relative importance of each complaint. All received equal consideration with regard to the data analysis. A total of 191 complaints were recorded from the 110 reconsideration requests. After the data was recorded, the recorder's judgment for each reconsideration request was verified by two readers who read each form independently.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Following are the findings for the twelve research questions that were addressed in this study.

1. At what level library did the most reconsideration requests originate? Of the 110 reconsideration requests that were processed, 88 or 80.0 percent originated at the elementary school level; 15 or 13.6 percent

at the Junior High level; 6 or 5.5 percent at the Senior High level; and 1 or 0.9 percent at the adult/professional library level. A possible explanation for the higher percentage of requests originating at the elementary level could be that parents of elementary age children are not only more aware of what their children are reading but are more protective of what they read. Another consideration is that controversial issues are often more apparent in books for younger children because of the number of pictures and/or the shortened text. (Insert Table 1)

2. Was a particular format subject to a higher percentage of reconsideration requests than others? The two formats that were most often challenged were fiction books and picture books. Forty-nine or 44.5 percent of the reconsideration requests involved fiction books and 36 or 32.7 percent involved picture books. (Insert Table 2)
3. Was a particular literary genre subject to a higher percentage of reconsideration requests than others? The literary genre that was challenged most often was contemporary realistic fiction. Fifty-five or 50.0 percent of the reconsideration request involved contemporary realistic fiction. The high percentage of challenges involving contemporary realistic fiction could be due to the nature of that literary genre. The unique feature of contemporary realistic fiction is that it accurately depicts life as it could be lived today. Many of the topics dealt with in this type of literature reflect changes that are going on in society and many are formerly taboo topics -- such topics as changing family patterns, death and aging, drugs, child abuse, and human sexuality. Even though these topics are written under the veil of fiction, they are

presented in a straight-forward manner. And while some adults believe that realistic fictional experiences have a place in the lives of children and adolescents, others prefer to shield them from the explicit subject matter of many of these books. (Insert Table 3)

4. Has there been a significant increase in the number of reconsideration requests in recent years? The number of reconsideration requests that have been processed rose sharply in 1973, then steadily increased through 1976. This period was followed by a marked decreased for two years, then the number of requests again rose sharply in 1979 and 1980. Since the data for 1981 is incomplete (through May 1981) it is not possible to predict whether or not this trend will continue. Data in Table 4 show the pattern of these requests. The peak year for the number of requests that were processed was 1976. Of the 29 requests that were processed that year, 21 were challenges involving contemporary realistic fiction. A reason for that may well be that, by 1976, contemporary realistic fiction books were available in large enough quantities to make themselves visible. (Insert Table 4)

5. How have the number of reconsideration requests changed over the 10-year period with regard to the literary genre of the material? Table 4 indicates that the literary genres that have been consistently challenged over the 10-year period are Contemporary Realistic Fiction, Modern Fantasy, and Informational books.

6. What kind of action was taken most often? Data in Table 5 indicate that in 60 or 54.5 percent of the 110 reconsideration requests, the material was retained; while in 22 or 20.0 percent of the requests, the material was withdrawn from the library. (Insert Table 5)

7. Did any literary genre consistently sustain a certain type of action against it? The two literary genres that seemed to consistently sustain a certain type of action against them were Contemporary Realistic Fiction and Informational books. Data in Table 5 shows that both literary genres had similar percentages of books retained and similar percentages of books that were withdrawn. This is not surprising since both literary genres tend to treat topics in a straight-forward manner and both have a tendency to deal with current high interest topics that are often controversial in nature.

8. Does a particular type of action occur more often at a certain grade level? Data in Table 6 indicate that, for all four levels of libraries, the action taken most often was the retention of the material being challenged. These findings would also indicate that there are a greater variety of actions that take place at the elementary level with the variety of actions decreasing as the level of the library increases. This would suggest that there are fewer "grey areas" when dealing with selection issues at the upper levels of libraries, partly because there are fewer age/developmental levels to contend with at the Junior High level and at the Senior High level. The elementary school level is much more critical because the range of the age/developmental levels of the students is broader. (Insert Table 6)

9. What kinds of complaints were received most often? Up to three complaints were recorded for each reconsideration request giving a total of 191 complaints for the 110 reconsideration requests. Table 7 shows the frequency and nature of each complaint. (Insert Table 7)

10. What were the particular kinds of complaints that seemed to result more

often in the withdrawal of the material from the library? Data in Table 7 show the kinds of complaints that tended to result in the material being withdrawn from the library. For example, 60 percent of the complaints involving alternative lifestyles resulted in the material being withdrawn from the library.

11. Have the nature of complaints changed over the 10-year period? Data in Table 8 indicate that complaints involving explicit sex/sexual activity and profanity show a slight decline in recent years, while complaints involving bodily functions/nudity and violence seem to have increased slightly in recent years. On the whole, the nature of the complaints seem to have remained relatively consistent over the 10-year period. (Insert Table 8)

12. Which variables were most important in determining if the material was withdrawn from the library? A stepwise logistic regression was used to determine the relative importance of each variable as a predictor of the action taken. The process involved a series of multiple regressions which identified the variables that were significant and then formed a model which would adequately explain the data. The five variables which were identified as being significant in predicting the action taken were complaints involving explicit sex/sexual activity, sexism, established family traditions, alternative lifestyles, and the level of library. A sixth variable, which involved complaints about religion was not found to be statistically significant at the 0.05 level of significance but was included in the model because it improved the fit of the model. The chi-square value for the final model was 74.74 with 95 degrees of freedom and had a p-value of 0.938. The p-value of 0.938 for goodness of fit was significant at the .10 level of significance. Table 9 shows the

relative importance of the six variables as predictors of the action taken according to the degree to which they improved the fit of the model. (Insert Table 9)

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that the number of challenges to books and instructional materials have not increased disproportionately in recent years. However, since we are in the midst of a conservative era, a follow-up study could reveal a change in this pattern.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study has to do with the category of material being challenged. The literary genre that has been challenged most often is contemporary realistic fiction. The data indicate that challenges to this literary genre have been consistent over the 10-year period and that the majority of the material that was withdrawn from the libraries dealt with contemporary realism. Fourteen of the twenty-two items that were withdrawn were contemporary realistic fiction. This would suggest that measures need to be taken to make parents, teacher, and librarians aware of the unique characteristics of this type of fiction and of its value to the reader.

Another significant finding is that far more of the books and instructional materials were retained than were withdrawn from the library collections. Sixty of the 110 requests resulted in the materials being retained while 22 of the requests resulted in the material being withdrawn. This would suggest that the mere presence of a procedure for handling challenged materials provides some measure of protection. The findings of the recent AAP-ALA-ASCD survey found that schools that have written selection policies and reconsideration procedures appear to resolve conflicts with fewer restrictions on instructional and library materials.[4]

The presence of a procedure for handling challenged materials could provide the librarian with more freedom in selecting books and instructional materials that deal with sensitive topics. The librarian would not be held personally responsible for the challenged materials and the community would be assured that the challenges are given a fair consideration. A procedure for handling challenged materials may well be our best defense against the censorship problem.

REFERENCES

1. "News," SLJ School Library Journal 28:11 (January 1981).

2. Limiting What Students Shall Read. Association of American Publishers, the American Library Association, and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1981.

3. Larry Bartlett, "The Iowa Model Policy and Rules for Selection of Instructional Materials," in James E. Davis, ed., Dealing with Censorship (Urbana, ILL.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1979), p. 202-214.

4. Limiting What Students Shall Read, p. 22.

Table 1

Level of Library

(N= 10)

Level of Library	No. of Reconsideration Requests	Percentage of Total
Elementary (K-6)	88	80.0
Junior High (7-9)	15	13.6
Senior High (10-12)	6	5.5
Adult/Professional	1	0.9
Total	110	100.0

Table 2

Format of Material

(N=110)

Format	No. of Reconsideration Requests	Percentage of Total
Print		
Picture Book	36	32.7
Fiction	49	44.5
Non-Fiction	12	10.9
Periodical	4	3.6
Non-Print	7	6.4
Other (Tests)	2	1.8
Total	110	100.0

Table 3

Genre of Material

(N=110)

Genre	No. of Reconsideration Requests	Percentage of Total
Traditional Literature	5	4.5
Modern Fantasy	24	21.8
Poetry	2	1.8
Contemporary Realistic Fiction	55	50.0
Historical Fiction	2	1.8
Informational	19	17.3
Other (Instructional)	3	2.7
	110	100.0

Table 4

Relationship of Date of Reconsideration Request to Genre

(N=110)

	GENRE							
	TRADITIONAL LITERATURE	MODERN FANTASY	POETRY	CONTEMP. REALISM	HISTORICAL FICTION	INFORMATIONAL	OTHER	ROW TOTAL
Jan. 1971	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2 1.8
1972	0	2	0	1	0	1	0	4 3.6
1973	0	2	0	5	0	2	1	10 9.1
1974	0	3	0	3	0	5	2	13 11.8
1975	1	0	0	8	1	2	0	12 10.9
1976	1	5	0	21	0	1	0	28 25.5
1977	0	0	0	4	0	2	0	6 5.5
1978	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	2 1.8
1979	0	7	1	6	0	2	0	16 14.5
1980	3	4	1	4	0	1	0	13 11.8
May 1981	0	1	0	2	0	1	0	4 3.6
Column Total	5	24	2	55	2	19	3	110 100.0

Table 5

Relationship of Genre to Type of Action

(N=110)

GENRE	Type of Action: Retained	Reclassified	Structured Use	Withdrawn	Restricted to: Intermed.	Restricted to: Jr. High	Restricted to: Sr. High	Row Total
TRADITIONAL LITERATURE	4*	1	0	0	0	0	0	5
	80.0+	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.5
MODERN FANTASY	20	1	1	2	0	0	0	24
	83.3	4.2	4.2	8.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	21.8
POETRY	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	1.8
CONTEMPORARY REALISTIC FICTION	23	1	6	14	0	6	5	55
	41.8	1.8	10.9	25.5	0.0	10.9	9.1	50.0
HISTORICAL FICTION	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.8
INFORMATIONAL	8	0	2	5	1	1	2	19
	42.1	0.0	10.5	26.3	5.3	5.3	10.5	17.3
OTHER	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.7
COLUMN TOTAL	60	3	9	22	1	8	7	110
	54.5	2.7	8.2	20.0	0.9	7.3	6.4	100.0

* No. of Reconsideration Requests
\+ Percentage of each category, e.g., Traditional Literature, Modern Fantasy

Table 6

Relationship to Type of Action to Level of Library

(N=110)

Action Taken	Level of Library				Row Total
	Elementary	Jr. High	Sr. High	Adult	
Retained	47*	8	4	1	60
	53.4+	53.3	66.7	100.0	54.5
Reclassified	3	0	0	0	3
	3.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.7
Structured Use	8	1	0	0	9
	9.1	6.7	0.0	0.0	8.2
Withdrawn	20	0	2	0	22
	22.7	0.0	33.3	0.0	20.0
Restricted to Intermediate	1	0	0	0	1
	1.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.9
Restricted to Jr. High	8	0	0	0	8
	9.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	7.3
Restricted to Sr. High	1	6	0	0	7
	1.1	40.0	0.0	0.0	6.4
Column Total	88	15	6	1	110
	80.0	13.6	5.5	0.9	100.0

*No. of Reconsideration Requests
+Percentage of category, e.g. Elementary, Jr. High

Table 7

Nature of Complaints

(N=191)

Nature of Complaint	Frequency of Complaint	Percentage withdrawn from category
Violence (physical, psychological)	15	0.0
Profanity	27	14.8
Inappropriate Age Level	31	9.7
Literary/Artistic Quality	5	0.0
Inaccurate Presentation of Material	14	28.6
Stereotypes:		
Race	9	11.1
Age	2	0.0
Sex	10	40.0
Ethnocentric	2	0.0
Handicapped	3	0.0
Sex:		
Explicit Sex/sexual activity	21	38.1
Sexual preference	1	0.0
Bodily functions/nudity	16	6.3
Physical Maturation	2	0.0
Portrays values, beliefs or behavior contrary to those held by complainant:		
Political	1	0.0
Religious	9	33.3
Anti-social behavior (deviant, illegal)	11	18.2
Alternative lifestyles	5	60.0
Established social traditions	1	0.0
Established family traditions	6	50.0
Total No. of Complaints	191	

Table 8

Relationship of Date of Reconsideration Request to Nature of Complaint

(N=191)

Nature of Complaint	Jan. 1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	May 1981	Row Total
Violence			3*	1	1	2			3	5		15
			20.0+	6.7	6.7	13.3			20.0	33.3		
Profanity			6	1	3	8	2	1	2	2	2	27
			22.2	3.7	11.1	29.6	7.4	3.7	7.4	7.4	7.4	
Inappropriate age level			2	2	7	8	1		6	3	2	31
			6.5	6.5	22.6	25.8	3.2		19.4	9.7	6.5	
Literary/Artistic quality					1				4			5
					20.0				80.0			
Inaccurate Presentation of material				2	1	3	1	1	3	3		14
				14.3	7.1	21.4	7.1	7.1	21.4	21.4		
Stereotypes:												
Race		2	2	1	1				1	2		9
		22.2	22.2	11.1	11.1				11.1	22.2		
Age									2			2
									100.0			
Sex			1	3		1	1	1	2	1		10
			10.0	30.0		10.0	10.0	10.0	20.0	10.0		
Ethnocentric		1				1						2
		50.0				50.0						
Handicapped						1			1	1		3
						33.3			33.3	33.3		

*No. of Reconsideration Requests
+Percentage of category, e.g. Violence, Profanity

Table 8 (Continued)

Relationship of Date of Reconsideration Request to Nature of Complaint

(N=191)

Nature of Complaint	Jan. 1971	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	May 1981	Row Total
Sex:												
Explicit Sex/sexual activity	2*	1	2	3	1	9			1	1	1	21
	9.5+	4.8	9.5	14.3	4.8	42.9			4.8	4.8	4.8	
Sexual Preference										1		1
										100.0		
Bodily functions/ nudity		1		3	2	3	1		5		1	16
		6.3		18.8	12.5	18.8	6.3		31.3		6.3	
Physical maturation					2							2
					100.0							
Political						1						1
						100.0						
Religious	1			2	1	3				1	1	9
	11.1			22.2	11.1	33.3				11.1	11.1	
Anti-social behavior			1		3	4				3		11
			9.1		27.3	36.4				27.3		
Alternative lifestyles	1					4						5
	20.0					80.0						
Est. Social traditions				1								1
				100.0								
Est. Family traditions						3			2	1		6
						50.0			33.3	16.7		
												191

*No. of Reconsideration Requests

+Percentage of category, e.g. Violence, Profanity

Table 9

Relative Importance of Variables

in Predicting the Withdrawal Action

(N-110)

Variable	p-value*
Complaints involving:	
Explicit sex/sexual activity	0.030+
Sexism	0.046
Established family traditions	0.043
Alternative lifestyles	0.039
Religion	0.108
Level of Library	0.005

*P-value for significance of regression coefficients for the final model
+Statistically significant at the .05 level